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BOOK REVIEWS

The Virgin Islands of the United States of America. Historical and Descriptive, Commercial and Industrial Facts, Figures, and Resources. By Luther K. Zabriskie, formerly Vice-Consul of the United States of America at St. Thomas. New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1918. Pp. xvii+339.

The former Vice-Consul has written a very pleasing and instructive volume on these much discussed islands. That the purely historical suffers in such close intimacy with the raw facts of imports and exports does not lessen the value of his work. Perhaps unconsciously, Mr. Zabriskie has given us the proper critique of his work in the quotation from Jourdan with which he prefaces his book: "Reader, let this little taste that I have given thee of the Summer Islands satisfie thee for the present . . . Hastie occasione of business doth make me write somewhat hastilie, and leave out many things which were fitte to be spoken of . . .". In spite of the superficial treatment given to the history of the islands, it must be admitted that we have in this volume the "first comprehensive treatise on the Virgin Islands of the United States of America," as the author not unjustly calls his book.

The Danish West Indies passed into the possession of the United States in March, 1917. A farewell Service at the Reformed Dutch Church on Sunday, February 18, 1917, was the requiem of Danish rule, and on Saturday, March 17, the official transfer was made at St. Thomas. The ceremony was somewhat spectacular, but something special was needed to gloss over the crude bargaining of the United States for these islands. The sale was attempted in 1867, but miscarried; forty years later, it failed again. The expression of opinion as given in the newspaper accounts of the day are significant of the public feeling aroused. One editor speaks of the "nightmare" that will no longer disturb them. There is a grim humour in the attitude taken by the United States Government from the day that Seward first proposed the purchase of the islands from Denmark, but the "bargain days in Islands" were over on March 17, 1917, and the many humiliations the American Government had caused came to an end. The Great War was needed to emphasize the necessity of possession. The "Farewell

to Dannebrog . . . Welcome to Old Glory" closed a regime of over two hundred and fifty years. "It is but natural," one observer wrote at the time, "that one's emotions on such an occasion should be stirred to their depths, and as the old flag came down, tears filled the eyes of our women, and strong, robust men shook as the tears rolled down their cheeks—it was a sad sight, cutting to the heart, made more solemn perhaps by the sound of the guns in the Royal salute, while the band played the Danish national anthem. But quickly ran up the Starry Banner, and again the hearts of the people were cheered. In deep hopes for the future they saw the Stars shine out."

The Virgin Islands of the United States of America, as their new official title reads, constitute some fifty or more independent islands. Columbus, we are told, named the islands after St. Ursula and her virgins. Only three of these are of sufficient importance either to the historian or to the commercial traveller. These are St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. The history of Thomas begins with the arrival of Erik Smidt, the Dane, on March 30, 1666. Nearly two hundred years had passed since Columbus had sighted it, but beyond a few carvings on a rock, some stone chisels, and other trivial relics, all trace of the inhabitants up to Smidt's coming had disappeared. In 1701, Father Jean-Baptiste Labat, a Dominican missionary, visited the island, and with his *Nouveau Voyage aux isles Françaises de l'Amérique* (Paris, 1722), our first authentic history of the islands begins. From that date down to the sale, it is a record of great trade, numerous fleets of shipping vessels, colossal fortunes made and lost, and then a long period of lean years, when the beautiful harbor of St. Thomas lay deserted and the town of Charlotte Amalie slumbered, dreaming of the great days that were past. St. Croix is called the Garden of the West Indies. At one time it was the seat of government for the Danish West Indies. Discovered also by Columbus, we hear nothing of the island until 1625, when Dutch and English colonists came to the island. Its history and its fate have been closely identified with those of St. Thomas. The island of St. John was first formally taken possession of by Denmark in 1684, but colonists did not come until 1816, when the first came over from St. Thomas. The population of the three islands amounted in 1911 to 27,086. In 1791, the total population was 31,426, and

in 1835 the number had increased to 43,178. Since that date, a steady decrease in the population has taken place. The religious statistics contains the following figures: English-Episcopal, 9,050; Catholics, 7,369; Moravians, 5,543; Lutherans, 3,206; Methodists, 1,174; other, 744.

The purpose of the purchase can best be told in the report of Vice-Admiral Foster:

St. Thomas lies right in the track of all vessels from Europe, Brazil, the East Indies, and the Pacific Ocean bound to the West Indian Islands or to the Atlantic States. It is the point where all vessels coming from any of the above stations touch for supplies. It is a central point from which any or all of the West Indian islands can be assailed, while it is impervious to attack from landing parties, and can be fortified to any extent. The bay, on which lies the town of St. Thomas, is almost circular, the entrance being by a neck guarded by two heavy forts, which can be so strengthened and protected that no foreign power can ever hope to take it. St. Thomas is a small Gibraltar of itself and could not be attacked by a naval force. There would be no possibility of landing troops there, as the island is surrounded by reefs and breakers, and every point near which a vessel or boat could approach is a natural fortification and only requires guns, with little labour expended on fortified works. There is no harbour in the West Indies better fitted than St. Thomas for a naval station. Its harbour and that of St. John, and the harbour formed by Water Island, could contain all the vessels of the largest navy in the world, where they would be protected against an enemy. In fine, St. Thomas is the keystone to the arch of the West Indies. It commands them all. It is of more importance to us than to any other nation.

The book contains chapters on Steamer Service between the islands, Harbour Facilities, Imports and Exports, Banks, Currency, Sanitation and Public Works, Agriculture, Sugar Cane, and Manufactures. The last eight chapters deal with the Sale and Transfer of the Islands: "Few sections of the world," says the author, "provide more interesting material for the writing of books, but comparatively little use has been made of this material up to the present time." Mr. Zabriskie has written a very entertaining story out of these materials and has enhanced his book with many photographic illustrations. Here and there in his volume there is a reference to his material, but a list of sources and books for the student would have added value to his work. The historical student hopes that, in Jourdan's phrase, "ere it be long thou shalt have a larger relation thereof."